2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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grouped together in battle, and still eat together ceremoniously, e.g. at mourning feasts. The *kwanyirok* have their foreheads scarred in the same manner as commoners. Lines of scar marks are also made on the breast, across the shoulder blade, and two rectangular masses above the umbilicus; these are considered to have no tribal significance but are done for the sake of adornment and are said to be admired by the opposite sex.

We are indebted to Mr. Heany for a note on Shilluk customs, which seem to indicate that the milk avoidances of the Nilotes are dependent on fear of contamination associated with the sexual act.

A young woman does not drink milk under any circumstances, though a woman who is nursing a baby may, as do old women past the reproductive age. Only small boys herd the cattle and milk them, for once a boy has reached maturity there is the danger that he may have had sexual contact, when if he milked, or handled manure, or even walked among the cattle in their pens, he would cause them to become sterile. These beliefs are held so strongly that a child who goes to his neighbours to drink milk must have a bath before he returns home, lest milk might adhere to him, be mixed with food, and be eaten by someone who was unclean. If a man has had sexual relations with his wife or another he is considered unclean and does not drink milk until the sun has set the following day. Mr. Heany could not discover that anyone objected to drinking milk drawn by himself, nor does anyone avoid taking milk and meat together. The pottery vessels used for milk are not used for any other purpose.

A woman cooks for her husband and leaves the hut while he eats, but it is not shameful for men and women to be seen eating together, and after a man has eaten the main part of a meal a woman and her friends, usually her unmarried *nyiwo* (if her *gol* is not distant), may sit and eat while he continues his meal. A newly married couple do not eat together. Small reed mats called *pero* are used to put over pots of food to keep off flies and dust, and out of respect a woman might stand one of these upright to screen her face while eating or drinking.

16: Cann G-5 (ca. 1928) 1929 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN IDLE SHILLUK.

By Captain G. P. Cann.

WHILE passing through the river ports of the Central District of the Upper Nile Province a casual observer is prone to comment on the apparent idleness of the Shilluk, as if it was the normal state of the tribe; and although such a traveller is probably within his rights in drawing this conclusion from the abnormal conditions under which he meets the Shilluk in river ports—for the native of the Southern Districts of the Sudan has certainly achieved a high standard in the art of doing nothing when on holiday—he is desired to remember that the Shilluk seen on the river bank on the arrival of a steamer is keenly interested (and even amused) in all the strange sights that meet his eye: the steamer itself with its tiers of decks with the flats and cabins on the roof, the motley collection of humanity on the barges, and by no means least the *bwiny* or foreigner with his lusted camera and amazing dress and incredible customs.

Can one wonder, then, that the Shilluk is prepared to stand for hours and simply gaze on such interesting sights?

The writer is 'on trek' at the moment, and is so struck by the strong relief afforded by village life that he has fallen to the use of the pen in vindication of the libelled Shilluk.

Awaking long before dawn one finds that smoke fires amongst the cattle have been kept up assiduously throughout the night, and already shadowy forms are passing amongst the herds and moving a beast where necessary to get more benefit from the smoke.

Dawn approaches and the herds are becoming restless, so every man turns to to release them, and four or five youths drive the cattle away some two or three miles inland, where flies are known to be less troublesome, and a first feed of dry grass is available to start the day.

Almost immediately hosts of small boys appear on the scene, the smaller ones—from seven to ten years of age—to bring out the goats and sheep from the *huts* in which they have passed the night, safe from

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16: Cann G-5 (ca. 1928)1929 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

the depredations of hyænas, and the boys of from ten to fifteen years to clear up the standings of the cattle, collect the head ropes, and clean out the kraals.

By the time the boys have finished their duties the cattle are brought back to the village for milking, and the small boys leave with their herds of sheep and goats for pasture and are not seen again until nearly sunset.

Milking is accompanied by much grooming and cleaning of the cattle, and is one of the proudest hours of the Shilluk's life when he handles his beasts in view of the world.

At about 10.30 a.m. the cattle are driven to their dung pasture accompanied by an escort of fighting youths who are responsible for protection against wild beasts, reptiles and predatory human beings.

Cattle and sheep herding by day is the work of youths and boys, and is full-time employment from dawn to dusk—varied by a certain amount of fish-spearing as a recreation—so we will leave them to their duties and turn to the older men to see to what extent the stigma of laziness applies to them.

At the time of writing the first rains have fallen, so every able-bodied man who is not engaged in cattle herding leaves for his cultivation area—which is generally at least three miles inland from the village—before dawn; this early start becomes of vital importance when the *dura* is first sown, as the guinea-fowl descend from the trees at dawn to consume the seed sown on the previous day, and the cultivator is thus unable to leave his plot until after dusk, when these fowl have gone to roost.

Women bring food and water to the cultivator twice a day besides carrying out their ordinary household duties which we will now survey.

Shilluk villages for freedom from mosquitoes and other reasons are usually situated from one to three miles away from the Nile, and before dawn one or two women or girls from each house have to go to the river to fill all their available earthen pots and gourds with water for the use of the house before the men go away to work; the ordinary earthen vessel or *pak* when full weighs between thirty and forty pounds, and two or even three trips have to be made to the river daily to supply the needs of the home, so water carrying can only be done by the stronger women and girls.

16: Cann G-5 (ca. 1928) 1929 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Houses are swept out soon after dawn by older women and small girls, and they are responsible for the collection of firewood for cooking purposes.

Very soon after the return of the water-carrying party the sound of dura pounding is heard on all sides, and this work and the preparation of native beer for the household goes on intermittently all day: the meal times for men being about 10 a.m. and 7 p.m., while the women snatch meals at odd hours.

At the time of writing every spare moment of the day is spent by the women in sowing the dura and maize crop around the village, the work proceeding steadily from dawn to dusk.

Even after dark the women have to finish the preparation and serve the evening meal to their men, and, as this is the main meal of the day, woe betide the wife who has not prepared it in time or to the satisfaction of her lord!

At about 5.30 p.m. the small boys return with the goats and sheep, and these—after having been re-united with their offspring—are turned into the *luaks* for the night.

Then smoke fires are lighted in readiness for the cattle which are herded in at dusk, tied up with head ropes, and milked; these duties keep nearly all the men busy until after 7 p.m., soon after which the cultivators return from their labours.

Rather than call the Shilluk a lazy race, let us say that they understand the art of taking their ease restfully!

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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in a leopard skin for a dance. Apart from these privileges, however, the son or grandson of a king is in no other way distinguished; he must undertake the menial tasks which fall to the lot of the boys of the village, the herding of the cows and sheep, the milking and the cleaning of the byre; he submits to the same ordeal of tattooing and cannot anticipate his initiation dance, the great coming-of-age celebration, by which he and others of his age-group formally become full members of the tribe. He is accorded a special respect, and if he is a Nyireth, a son of the king, is eligible for election to the high office of king of his people. The fifth generation of the king's descendants, though they are allowed to retain the title of Kwanyireth, descendants of the king, merge into the common people and are treated as such.

The second class is that of the Ororo, which holds a peculiar position in the social system. Its members are of royal blood, but are for ever debarred from election to the kingship. Shilluk history relates that of the fifth king, Ocalo, all the sons of his first wife were slain in battle with the Nuer, save one. This was a puny boy whom his father despised as unfit to be king. In his grief and rage at the loss of his sons, Ocalo threw the sacred spears of Nyikang into the river to signify that he considered his house at an end, since he had now no son worthy of succeeding him. The son who was left, Duad by name, upbraided his father fiercely, and swore that if ever he became king he would disinherit and degrade the other children of Ocalo. Eventually he did become king, and kept to his oath. His half-brothers were all degraded to the level of commoners, but because of their undoubted royal ancestry they formed a special clan among the other royal clans. To compensate them for the loss of their rank they were given, and still hold, special functions at the installation and burial ceremonies of the king. They used also to hold the office of royal executioners and put to death all those who fell under the king's displeasure, but in these more enlightened times, that office is no longer required.

The third class is that of the Colo. Strictly speaking this

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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574 [270] like bellows, and then passes it on. Pipe and beer circulate freely, and under the mellowing influence of both, tongues are quickly loosened and conversation turns to the perennial [521] topic of cattle. After a while, your cigarette finished, you will excuse yourself to your host and, rising from your cramped position, greet everyone present in turn and make your escape into the open air.

512 The Shilluk, sensible man, starts his day with the sun. He emerges from his hut, however, with heavy head and blood- [513] shot eyes, since he has been sleeping for seven or eight hours in a small windowless hut with the doorway blocked with a [372] heavy grass mat and perhaps a smoky fire burning as a [825] protection against mosquitoes. As a further defence against [751] these pests he covers himself from head to foot with the red ashes from the cow-dung fire, but this does not worry him; [515] if there is water handy he may rinse his hands and face, if not, he will remain as he is until his next visit to the river —perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow or the next day—gives him the chance of taking a bath.

Gradually the village comes to life: the women appear, winding their drab-looking cloths round them, and set off [484] on their daily pilgrimage to the river with the heavy water pots balanced on their heads. The little group breaks up and the women fall into line, one behind the other, as they reach the narrow track leading out of the village, chattering like starlings as they sway along. The boys come out of the 512 byre smothered like their elders in the red ashes in which • 257 they have been lying all night, looking like imps from the [233] lower regions. They begin to clean up round the tethered [372] cattle, collecting the cow dung and spreading it out to [234] dry in the sun for fuel. When this is done they milk the [252] cows and goats. From one compound comes the sound of dull thumping as some girl pounds the millet grain into coarse flour. The grain is small and hard, red or white in colour. It is first winnowed by being poured at shoulder height from a basket and then sieved in a boat- [415] shaped scoop of plaited fibre. The grain is then put into a

Z9:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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narrow circular hole in the ground about a foot deep, and steadily pounded with a heavy, six-foot pole wielded with all the strength a young pair of arms and shoulders can bring to the task. The coarse flour which results from this operation is soaked in water and then ground again, this time between two hard, rough stones. The flour is ready for use; it is mixed with water and boiled in a shallow iron dish to make a thick porridge, and this, flavoured with a little salt if that is available, and mixed with a little milk, constitutes the meal. Young women, however, are denied the luxury of milk, unless they are nursing a baby.

By the time the women have returned from the river, ground the flour and cooked the porridge, it is already nine o'clock. If it is the dry season and there is no work to be done in the fields, the men have been sitting around since sunrise busy perhaps with some task such as making a grass rope or weaving a fish trap, or merely gossiping away the time until their food is ready. When a woman has cooked her husband's breakfast she takes it into the living hut, and then leaves while he eats. She never eats with him, though she may return later, before he has finished, and eat her own meal sitting apart; she may also join other women and eat with them. When breakfast is over the men resume their tasks, and if there is a nice part of the river bank shaded with trees, such as is to be found at Detwok, they will take their rope making and weaving materials or their fishing net and pass the day there pleasantly enough. The young boys untether the bleating sheep and goats which pour out of the village running in search of grass and water, followed by their herds who add to the din by yelling and whistling; the cattle follow at a more leisurely pace in charge of the older boys. Soon the village is empty of animals save for the mangy, half-starved dogs nosing about for scraps of food, and the scraggy chickens picking up grains of millet scattered here and there in the compound. The little girls appear, staggering under the weight of the fat babies they carry on their hips. The women and the older girls go about the never-ending household tasks, cleaning up after their untidy menfolk,

29:Dempsey M-S (1940-1954) 1955
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advantage of the superiority that the mission education gave them over their fellows, for one became a doctor; not, alas! one of the medical variety, but a witch doctor, and the other, rejoicing in his knowledge of writing and arithmetic, tried to forge a paysheet, and now languishes in Malakal Gaol.

To the Shilluk, the foreigner and all his works were of little or no interest, unless he could see some immediate personal benefit to himself. The missionary was a person whom he hoped to touch for a piastre or a spoonful of tobacco; the mission was a place where those good, but queer, women, the Sisters ('*Thasaw*'—an attempt at the Italian '*Suor*'—as he called them), could be relied upon to produce a remedy for his tummyache, a bandage for his sores and a soothing medicine for his rheumy eyes. So, too, education meant nothing to him. The mission school did not mean a place where his children could learn to read and write, but rather a convenient nursery and boarding house where offspring could be dumped during the period when food was short in the village, and in the rainy season when parents were busy about the all-important business of planting and were only too glad to have their infants out of the way and from under their feet. They knew that in the mission the child would be well fed and housed, would even be given a yard or so of white cloth to wear and a blanket in which to roll himself at night. And when the rains were over and the grain baskets once more full, he could promptly be recalled to the family hearth, to attend to the domestic chores of minding the baby or tending the herd of goats and sheep.

The boys, too, who did condescend to attend the school, were for the most part not particularly worried about their academic advancement. They came because it was a novelty for them; it was a change from the life of the cattle camp and the village; from the milking of cows and the herding of goats and the nursing of squalling babies. They came also because of the amenities the status of a scholar offered to them; the resplendent white cloth with which to cover their

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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dusty nakedness; the good red blankets to protect them from the cold at night; the two solid meals a day in which oil and salt were always to be found, and frequently meat and groundnuts as well, and the joys and thrills of football. For these and other blessings the Shilluk boy was quite willing to put up with the nuisance of having to sit in a classroom for a few hours each morning, with the grind of gozintas and the making of ridiculous marks on a slate. After all, he needn't learn these things if he didn't want to; when the novelty of the place wore off, and even the delights of football began to cloy, he could always run away and return to the freedom of the pampas and the cattle camp, and if he had any luck he might be able to get away with his cloth and his blanket too. And, by heaven, they did run away, with a regularity that became monotonous. I suppose that during the first couple of years, for every boy who found learning to his liking and settled down to make it his career, ten tired after a month or two and returned to the less exacting life of the kraal and the cattle camp.

Sometimes it would suddenly dawn on a Shilluk parent that he hadn't seen his son and heir about the place for the past week or two, and that his herd was either tended by a substitute, or else running wild to the detriment of his neighbours' corn fields, and with a baleful light in his eye and a willowy stick in his hand, he would make a bee-line for the mission. Or perhaps he would be returning from the river and would stand stock still and rub his eyes in astonished incredulity on beholding the vision of the apple of his eye clad in spotless white, his face shining with soap and his soul with virtue, among the alumni of Detwok Academy. Disturbed in whatever I was doing by the ear-piercing shrieks that one usually associates with pig killing, I would rush to the spot. But the result was always the same; the white badge of scholarship would be whipped off the boy and flung indignantly in my direction; the erring youth, after dodging round a few obstacles to avoid the shrewd cuts of the ashplant, would break for the open and hare it in the general direction of French Equatorial Africa, his irate dad